

**Statement for**

**General Michael E. Ryan**  
**Chief of Staff, U.S. Air**  
**Force**

**Before the**  
**Senate Armed Services Committee**

**October 26, 1999**

**WRITTEN STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD  
SASC**

**26 October 1999**

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to update you on Air Force readiness. On behalf of the men and women in our Air Force who serve this nation with valor and professionalism, I thank you for your continued focus on improving military readiness, particularly improvements in pay and compensation. They deserve and appreciate the restoration of the 50% retirement system, closing the pay gap, pay table reform, and the many other compensation initiatives approved in this year's legislation. Thank you for your strong, substantial, and swift support of our airmen and their families.

**AEROSPACE POWER**

The Air Force must maintain constant and credible global readiness and warfighting capabilities to support the National Security Strategy. Aerospace power continues to be pivotal to the success of our theater commanders in times of both peace and conflict. Since my last testimony to this committee, the Air Force has been continually engaged in military operations around the world. Earlier this year, we fought the equivalent of a major theater air war in Kosovo. Before ALLIED FORCE we were operating from 5 fixed and 4 expeditionary bases in Europe. At the end of the build-up, we had moved into 21 more bases, erecting tent cities and deploying over 500 aircraft throughout Europe. We flew over 11,000 airlift sorties and moved hundreds of millions of pounds of cargo.

ALLIED FORCE, together with our other global commitments, meant that by percentage of force, our active duty force was more heavily tasked than at any time over the past four decades, including DESERT STORM and VIETNAM. Our airmen and their equipment performed magnificently. They were 2.5 times more likely to have had a surface-to-air missile shot at them than during DESERT STORM. Despite this high threat density we had only 2 combat losses. The Air Force flew over 54% of the 38,000 combat sorties and dropped 88% of the 23,000 expended munitions. And it was a Total Force effort. The Air Guard and Reserves provided 40% of our deployed KC-135 air refuelers, 25% of our A-10 force, and flew over 50% of the airlift sorties.

Simultaneously, we responded to Iraqi aggression on almost a daily basis in OPERATIONS NORTHERN and SOUTHERN WATCH. We've also deployed to Korea and other hot spots, while providing humanitarian relief to ease the international suffering caused from Hurricane Mitch in South America and Hurricane Dora in Johnston Atoll. We've also responded to the earthquakes in Greece, Taiwan and Turkey; and, we've airlifted critically needed supplies into East Timor. Here in the U.S. we've flown many lifesaving and follow-on missions in the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd.

While the United States Air Force must be capable of fighting and winning major theater wars, our nation depends more now than ever on the Air Force to be both a rapid response and engagement force. That's why we implemented our aerospace expeditionary force (AEF) schedule on 1 October. We're working hard to provide predictability to our people and still respond quickly to the needs of the theater commanders. We are now organized to manage the day-to-day contingency

responses with greater pre-planning. At the same time, the AEF schedule gives our nation and our combatant CINCs 20% of the deployable Air Force as trained and ready to fight at a moment's notice, while the other 80% remains ready for major theater wars. Our people need the predictability and stability the AEFs provide.

As described in previous testimonies last year and earlier this year, we continue to monitor our readiness levels across the force with concern. Several years of sustained high operations tempo and reduced funding in real terms have contributed to the slow, steady decline in our readiness. However, based on the many actions taken by the Administration with the help of this committee and Congress we believe this will arrest the negative readiness trend. The Fiscal Year 1999 supplemental funding helped address many of our most critical readiness needs, and the Fiscal Year 2000 budget will help us focus on other readiness challenges. As I testified last year, the Air Force needed \$5 billion a year across the future year defense plan to make our force whole again. We've received commitment in the President's budget for approximately half of that requirement in Fiscal Year 2000. However, we still have unfunded requirements that contribute to our readiness shortfalls. We will need your continued support beyond the Fiscal Year 2000 budget to reverse the readiness decline.

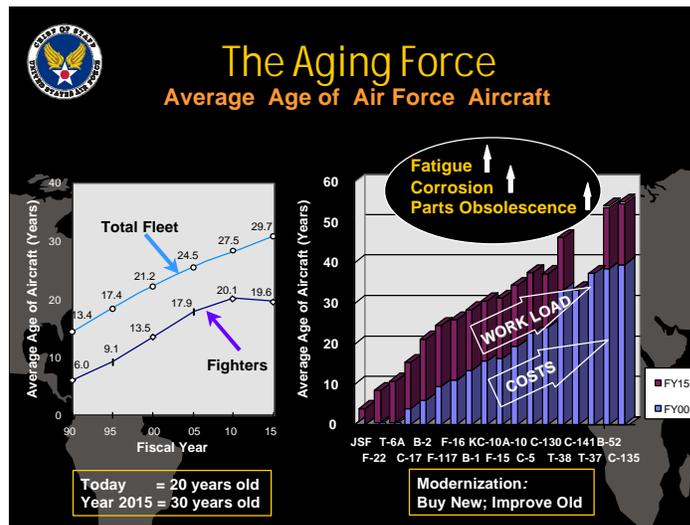
## **FORCE**

All Air Force aviation units continue to be tasked by joint operational plans to deploy and conduct operations during the earliest phases of contingencies.

Therefore, we always try to keep our forces at high readiness levels, whether they are

at home or deployed. The need for constant preparedness requires careful allocation of limited resources as we try to balance the requirements for readiness today and modernization needs for tomorrow's readiness.

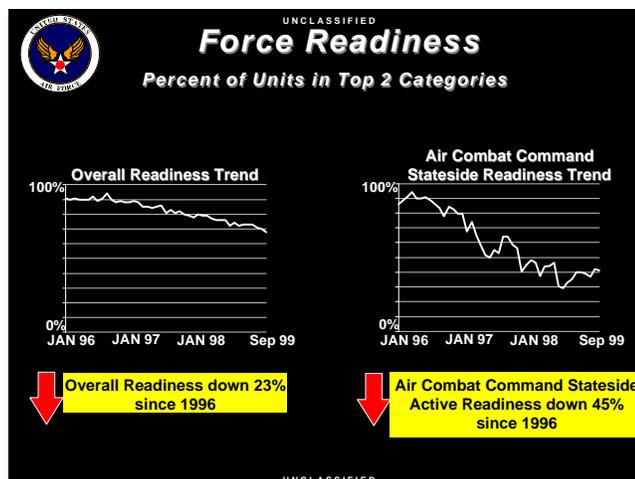
High operations tempo has taken its toll on the force. Our officers and airmen are still deploying 4 times as often with a 40% smaller force than the Cold War. They're engaging and responding around the globe with 20-year-old equipment today. Much of that same equipment will be 30 years old in 2015, even if we execute every planned modernization program.



These older aircraft require more manpower and resources to keep them ready to fight in the future. We're upgrading existing platforms and modernizing other systems where it is militarily and economically prudent. However, the global proliferation of 5<sup>th</sup> generation threat equipment must be countered. That's why all our military forces need the capability the F-22 provides. The F-22 will be able to penetrate these threats, neutralize them, and establish the CINCs' requirement for air

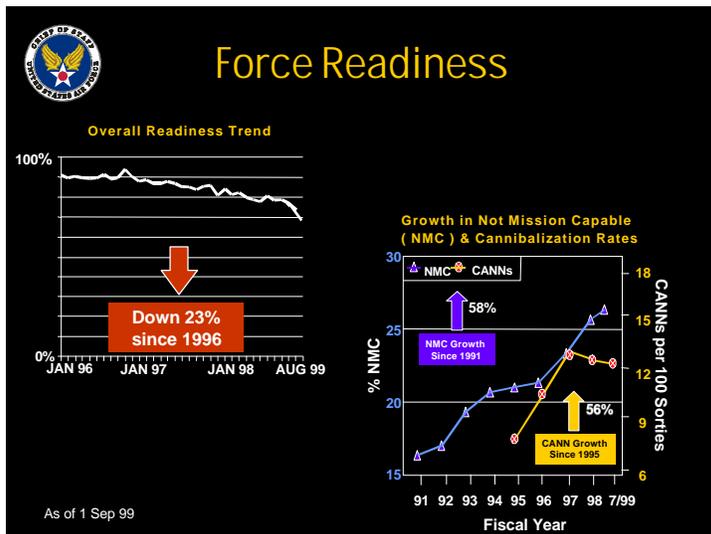
dominance – so that other older aircraft that we can't replace in the near future can fly their missions with acceptable risk levels for many years into the future.

Underfunding, loss of skilled personnel, and high operations tempo over the past several years have impacted Air Force readiness. The recent victorious Balkan air campaign, ALLIED FORCE, strained the force further. And while we are currently working to replenish spares and munitions stocks, and re-training our people back to a higher readiness level, the readiness of our forces is of critical concern. The overall combat readiness is down an additional 5% since my last testimony in March, 1999 for a total of 23% readiness decline since 1996. Stateside units lead the decline.



Our Air Force men and women, and their commanders continue to do great work in coping with the readiness challenges, despite heavy tasking and tough fiscal constraints. Nonetheless, the mission capable rates for major Air Force weapon systems steadily declined by nearly 10% since 1991 to a mission capability rate of 74% today. Parts cannibalization rates are still too high and are an indicator of the increased workload on our maintenance crews. These indicators continue to point to

significant readiness challenges now and in the future. We anticipate the additional funding for spares and depot work in Fiscal Years 1999 and 2000 will help arrest this mission capability decline. It will take a sustained effort to reverse it.

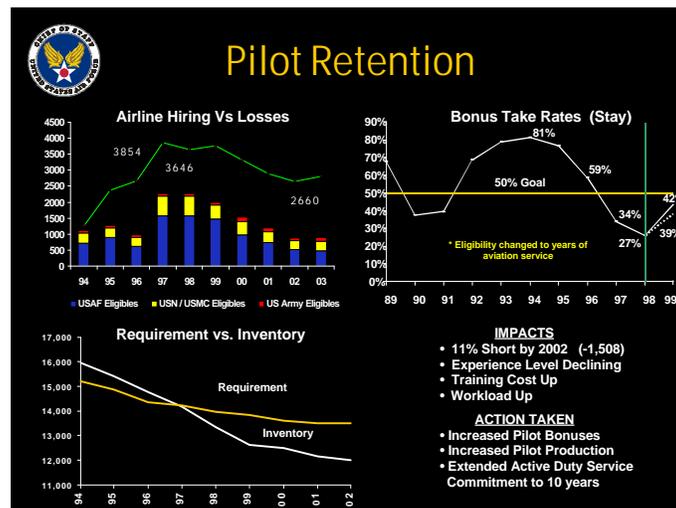


## PEOPLE

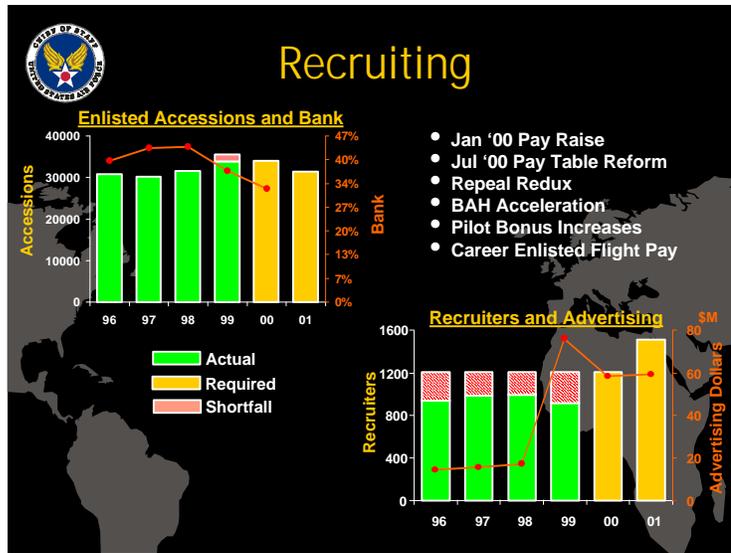
People continue to be our most vital resource—they are the most critical component of readiness. The intense demand we place on them as they perform Air Force missions around the world require highly motivated, highly skilled, professional airmen. However, today we are performing more missions with fewer people. Indeed, today's active duty force is smaller than at any other time in Air Force history—and we are busier than ever.

We're grateful for the commitment and visible action from the Congress and Administration to take care of our people—we're already seeing some signs of improvement. For example, I've been voicing my grave concern about the pilot shortage that we have in the Air Force. Last year only 27% of our pilots accepted a

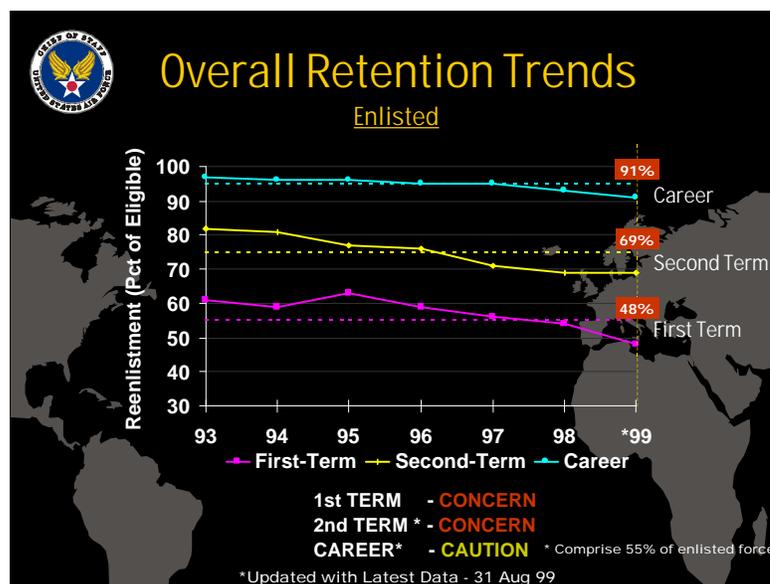
bonus to extend their length of service for up to 6 years. This year 42% of our pilots accepted the bonus to date. Despite this increase we still forecast a shortage of 1,500 pilots by 2002. The airline industry demand will be incessant for the foreseeable future. We're hopeful that the new bonus approved for FY 2000 will help to reduce this shortage.



Recruiting and retention of our enlisted force are key factors in the readiness equation. Although we recruited more airmen in 1999 than 1998, 1999 was the first year that we did not meet our recruiting goal. We had to dip into our delayed enlistment bank of young people already committed to active service to access as many as possible. Even with the help of enlistment bonuses, recruiters are working harder and harder to find the required number of quality recruits. We have increased our advertising funds and the number of recruiters to address these challenges.



Overall retention remains a serious concern. We fell below our end strength authorization of 370,000 active duty members by 10,000 people. Declining re-enlistment trends for our first and second term, and career airmen is the principle contributor to this shortfall. While we've continued to see a declining trend in retention, the trend for second term airmen stabilized in 1999—although it is still 6% below our goal of 75%. The negative retention trend exacerbates the high operations tempo problem because it places a greater burden on those who continue to serve.



1998 was the first year since 1981 that we were unable to meet our reenlistment goals for all three reenlistment categories—1999 was the second year. The highly technical nature of our aerospace force today and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires us to retain highly skilled individuals, particularly our NCOs, to ensure we can execute our missions. We especially must retain a sufficient number of experienced non-commissioned officers. These mid-career, technically trained airmen represent an experience and leadership base critical to force readiness. We expect to see retention improvements resulting from the compensation increases this committee sponsored in the Fiscal Year 2000 budget.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE**

Because quality people are so important to readiness, we must also ensure they have a quality working and living environment. Due to funding shortfalls, we continue to significantly under invest in our base operating support, real property maintenance, family housing, and military construction. In short, our infrastructure continues to deteriorate and is having a negative effect on readiness. We have a \$4.4 billion real property maintenance backlog—and it's growing. Our houses average 35 years of age. We can only afford to renovate a small percentage of these houses each year out of the 110,000 houses we maintain. We cannot continue to mortgage the infrastructure area of our force readiness—where our force works and lives—without significant long-term effects.

## **SUMMARY**

The men and women of your Air Force are dedicated and selfless professionals. Approximately 90,000 of them are forward stationed and deployed throughout the world today defending our country. They deserve the best equipment and training, quality medical care, adequate housing for their families, equitable pay, and a reasonable retirement for their service.

We are concerned about the continued downturn in readiness outlined in this statement, yet we are hopeful that we'll see the readiness decline abate as the Fiscal Year 1999 and 2000 budget initiatives take effect. Readiness is a fragile issue. Once lost, it takes resources, time, and constant attention to regain. That is why we will need substantial and sustained funding to meet the needs of our force and our nation.

We appreciate all this committee has done in helping to address these critical readiness issues and look forward to working with you in the future.